

NICK

Here is another story. Nick, a self-proclaimed “country boy,” was an independent man and a hard worker. For him, as with so many others, a bad lung infection and frightening shortness of breath marked the beginning of having to face COPD.

“...The infection that had made his breathing worse... eventually went away, but the process of facing up to the damage done to his lungs from years of smoking had just begun.

Although Nick got past that frightening emergency episode and was able to quit smoking, his breathing over the next few years was self-described as “a struggle” at best. He seemed to be doing less, but becoming short of breath and tired more quickly. Nick’s breathing was getting worse and worse. This downward slide in his activity level left him to wonder what was in his future. There were still things he wanted to do, things to enjoy. Having been a widower, Nick now found wonderful companionship with his second wife, Blanche. But if he couldn’t breathe and couldn’t move, what would happen to him from here on? Would Nick soon be spending his days just sitting in his chair, unable to do much of anything? These changes prompted Blanche, also, to worry about what would happen to her husband, a man who had been so strong and healthy, who she now saw struggling so hard just to breathe.

Some time after his trip to the emergency room, Nick was receiving therapy for a problem with his shoulder. The Physical Therapist told him about Pulmonary Rehab. Nick asked his internal medicine doctor about it and was referred to a Pulmonary Rehabilitation program.

When Nick walked into the Pulmonary Rehab department at age 71, the staff saw first, a man who was definitely struggling to breathe. Next, they saw Nick as a handsome man, a charmer, with a bit of a mischievous twinkle in his eye. It was easy to notice his brightly colored suspenders, as well as his look of concern. At this initial evaluation, the first step of a Pulmonary Rehab program, he told the staff softly, “My doctor thinks this program will help, and my wife wants me to come, but I don’t know if there’s anything you people can do to help me.”

As Nick began participating in the program, he remained skeptical. Back then he thought his inhalers were doing him more harm than good, he didn’t believe that a pulse oximeter (a device the staff used to check oxygen saturation) really worked, and couldn’t imagine how pursed-lip breathing could help. He questioned everything, but in a good-natured way. Boy, did the Pulmonary Rehab staff have their work cut out for them!

With Blanche at his side, Nick drove 25 miles one way twice a week (in the West Michigan winter!) to participate in exercise and education. Gradually Nick’s exercise capacity increased along with his confidence in what was being taught to him by the staff. He felt so much better and had more control over his breathing; rather than feeling as if his breathing had control over him. Indeed, Nick was reaping the rewards of his hard work, continuing commitment, and positive attitude. This success made him a firm believer in the value of Pulmonary Rehab.

“Before this program, I didn’t know *what* to do to help myself. But here I learned how to use my inhalers, and that they really do work. I’ve also learned to live with my lung condition.”

“A big part of it is that he’s learned to cope,” added Blanche.

Before coming to the program Nick didn’t know how to avoid breathing troublemakers or how to watch for the early warning signs of a bad episode.

“I’ve learned how to think ahead and not get myself into these circumstances. It’s also helped a lot to work with my doctor and be able to ask questions of him and the staff here. And I’ve learned that exercise helps. Pulmonary Rehab has definitely been worth the time and effort. It really has.”

Nick went on to continue in the maintenance phase of Pulmonary Rehab, faithfully attending exercise every week while having fun and making new friends in class. A goal of his, as a result of participating in the program, was to start bowling again, which he did. Nick also rediscovered the joy of driving his tractor and traveling with Blanche. Knowing how much participating in Pulmonary Rehab had helped him to breathe better, feel better, *live* better, Nick, a former skeptic became one of the program's biggest promoters. He encouraged friends and acquaintances afflicted with COPD to live better by joining Pulmonary Rehab.

Often after exercise class Nick would pause a few minutes to talk privately with staff. He would put his hand on a staff member's shoulder, sincerely and emotionally saying, "You people have helped me so much. I just want to see others have the chance to improve like I have."